

RECREATION PROGRAM ANALYSIS REPORT

Introduction to Process

This report is an analysis of the City's recreation programs compared to similar programs in communities nationwide. Programs were reviewed for quality, levels of participation, fee structure, program amenities and marketing efforts. Staff was led through a process by the consultants to determine the core services to be analyzed.

Core services were defined as programs that consumed a large portion of the budget, were offered three out of four seasons per year, have dedicated staff assigned to the program, have a dedicated facility assigned to the program, and have wide demographic appeal.

Methodology

Staff grouped activities into the following core program categories:

Adult Sports; After School, Playground and Summer Camp; Aquatics; Contract Classes; Cultural Arts/Performing Arts; Facility Rentals; Family Programs; Senior Programs; Special Events; Therapeutic Recreation; Volunteers; Wellness and Fitness; and Youth Sports.

It should be noted that just because a service is not core does not mean that it is not important. Based on citizen feedback and other information a strategy may be developed to move a non-core service to core or to move a core service to non-core based on the importance of the program to the community.

Key Issues and Findings

The Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities offers a wide variety of programs and activities that promote healthy lifestyles, lifelong learning, and skill development. The program analysis revealed several common issues.

A. Fees for programs are low or non-existent. A cost recovery system needs to be established that provides for a reasonable Return On Investment (ROI) balanced against the need to provide core services at minimal or no cost. This system should be based on the following assumptions:

1. Fees should recover direct costs which include promotion (printing, mailing, fliers, etc.), instructor pay and benefits, consumable supplies, and where applicable, facility rental fees.
2. A process should be developed for waiving fees for economically disadvantaged citizens who wish to participate in programs.

B. The Department needs a better method of tracking participation in its programs. To better understand market share in all programs, the Department should be able to distinguish between gross participation and unique users.

Appendix

C. Consistency between programs needs to be developed. The Department is inconsistent in how it applies policies and procedures to its programs. For example, customers are charged a fee to use the weight room at Chinquapin but not at other sites.

D. The Department lacks a strategy to replace worn out or broken equipment. Capital items need to be inventoried and assigned a schedule for replacement. A cost recovery plan could include establishing a funding mechanism for equipment replacement.

E. The Department should to provide training to key staff members on benefits-based marketing, program evaluation, basic accounting, and program tracking.

Full Findings Report

The following is a discussion of the thirteen program areas evaluated. All program areas were assessed for their strengths and weaknesses. General findings and observations were developed in order to draw summary conclusions regarding each program area. This information will serve as a basis for the development of program recommendations when combined with other research conducted in the Needs Assessment.

Adult Sports

This program consists of traditional sports, which are offered on a variety of levels. Programs are offered year-round. Activities include coed and men's softball; coed soccer; coed volleyball; men's, women's, and master's basketball; and specialty tournaments. This is a core program with an annual participation rate of 7,500.

Strengths

- Variety of skill levels and playing times offered
- The department has a good share of the market
- The program has a long tradition in the city

Weaknesses

- Lack of adequate sized fields for coed and men's softball
- Lack of lighted fields for evening use
- Parking at facilities is inadequate
- Few gymnasiums available for use by adults

Key Findings and Observations

Fees are designed to cover program costs. Lack of field space and facilities restrict offerings. The unit has established and consistent registration policies and procedures in place for registration. There is a procedure for charging non-residents a higher fee.

After-School, Playground and Summer Camp

The department is serving a significant portion of the youth population ages 5-17. The program provides a structured environment for children after school and in the summer months. This is a core service with an annual participation rate of 7,565.

Strengths

- The program provides activities in a safe environment
- Program supports a strengthening families approach
- Program appears to be reaching a large number of children ages 5-17
- Partnerships exist with other city agencies

Weaknesses

- Facility space is limited
- Transportation is limited

Key Findings and Observations

Several programs are state licensed. Staff is looking into licensing all programs or at a minimum following state guidelines. The goal is to move forward with programs that require participants to be signed in and out. There are opportunities for growth in this area. This program has the potential to be a star revenue producer that could be key in subsidizing non-revenue producing programs. The ability to add unique activities such as adventure programs and non-traditional sports targeted at teens would enable the department to capture a larger share of the market. The marketing assets of this program position the department for cash and budget, relieving in-kind opportunities from sponsorships and partnerships. The program benefits from partnerships with other city agencies such as the Public Schools.

Aquatics

The department operates seven aquatic facilities. This is a core service with a long tradition. The bulk of facilities are located in the eastern portion of the city. Activities include skill development courses, fitness activities, and non-structured open swim times.

Strengths

- 7 Pools
- 1 year-round pool
- 2 large seasonal pools
- 4 mini seasonal pools
- Large variety of programming, classes and diversity of use
- Lifeguards are Ellis certified

Weaknesses

- Age and design of all pools are outdated
- Lack of parking at sites
- Difficult to maintain Health Department standards
- Ventilation in all pump rooms is non-existent
- Limited deck space at Rixse
- Pump rooms are hazardous at all facilities
- Expenses are high, and fees and charges are minimal

Key Findings and Observations

A comprehensive fee schedule has been developed for the aquatic facilities. Operating costs for the four seasonal mini-pools appear to be high. There appears to be more demand for services than there is facility space. A variety of courses and programs are offered. Program offerings are limited by facility size and availability. There are several safety issues with the mechanical areas of the aquatic facilities. National trends for aquatic staffing indicate a shortage of qualified personnel. The department has developed a training program in order to attain a pool of qualified staff.

Contract Classes

The department offers a variety of courses designed to develop skills and lifelong learning. Course offering include such activities as exercise and fitness, dance, and sports. Over 3,500 registrations took place in the last year.

Strengths

- Variety of classes
- Courses are offered at sites through out the city
- The cancellation rate is low (10%)

Weaknesses

- Transportation is not offered to classes
- Childcare is not available during classes
- Many facilities are older and small
- Program staff also has building responsibilities
- Budget and facility space limit offering new programs

Key Findings and Observations

Registration processes are clearly outlined in “In Your Neighborhood.” Facility space and configurations are limiting factors in expanding course offerings. There is inconsistency between contract classes that are fee based and similar free programs offered at recreation centers. For example, the MYO SIM Kendo/Karate Club, which charges no fee, may compete with the fee-based martial arts courses offered by the department. At the end of courses,

participants evaluate the program, providing a mechanism for staff to improve programs and offerings.

Cultural Arts/Performing Arts

The program encompasses dance, music, theater, visual arts, and literature. Programs are large events of 7,000 to 130,000 participants. This is a core service. Programs are popular and have a long tradition in the city. The programs provide a positive economic impact to the city. These programs support the mission of the Council appointed Commission for the Arts.

Strengths

- Enhances tourism
- Has a long tradition behind it
- Unique programs not offered elsewhere
- Promotional materials are attractive and informative

Weaknesses

- Artist pay is not to local standards
- Parking is limited at some venues
- Competition for grant funding
- Demand is greater than supply
- Low visibility in the department and community

Key Findings and Observations

Programs are heavily subsidized. The department has established guidelines for vendors. There are opportunities for sponsorships and other revenue enhancing activities.

Facility Rentals

Facility rentals include two separate indoor facilities (Lee Center and Durant Center) with multiple rooms. Park amenities such as picnic shelters and the amphitheater are also available for rent.

Strengths

- Lee Center has lights and sound in the auditorium
- Lee Center has a dance studio
- Lee Center has ample parking on the weekends

Weaknesses

- Lee Center building security needs improvement
- Commercial kitchen in Lee Center not utilized
- The department cannot use rental fees as they are deposited back into the general fund

- Not enough staff to effectively operate rentals
- Not enough parking at the Durant Center however more parking is being added
- The number of people allowed for each park rental is limited by parking availability

Key Findings and Observations

Chinquapin park rentals are handled separate from other park rentals. The department has established standards and procedures for rentals. Combined rentals from the Lee and Durant Centers and park rentals are approximately \$120,000. Rentals at Durant and Lee Centers are at maximum capacity. Fees are below market price. There appears to be excess demand for rentals.

Family Programs

Family programs provide an opportunity for parents and children to interact while participating in a recreational program. Programs are offered in a variety of settings.

Strengths

- Motivates cohesiveness with family and community
- Supplies and supports family needs
- Provides resources to families
- Provides life skills
- Helps to increase participation in programs offered at locations
- Helps to market the programs and the department
- Builds a support system and rapport between staff, parents, school, community, and children
- Helps to strengthen the relationships with the family members, the local government, the department, and the community

Weaknesses

- Location of activities offered
- Scheduling inconvenience
- Less interaction with parents as they get older
- Lack of communication with the parents
- Language barriers inhibit participation
- Lack of parental interest in participation, volunteering, their children, the facility, or events
- Limited transportation resources
- Lack of funding for the program by the city or the parents

Key Findings and Observations

There is a lack of consistency in the offerings in this area. While there is mention of a class or a sport for every member of the family in the "In Your Neighborhood" publication, there are no specific family programs. The overall offerings support the concept of family programs.

Senior Programs

The program provides socialization and interaction with other seniors. The program also offers special programming target at seniors for healthy living and lifelong learning. The department operates three senior centers.

Strengths

- Sports and fitness programs
- Creative and performing arts
- Educational and personal development programs
- Special events and activities

Weaknesses

- Lack of dedicated space for senior programming
- Transportation is limited but available through STU, Senior Taxi, and DOT Taxi
- Insufficient funding
- Cost for services increasing

Key Findings and Observations

Participation in this core program is increasing. Programs are free or have minimal fees, making these programs a high cost per experience. Senior centers and program offerings are geographically concentrated on the east side of Alexandria.

Special Events

The department facilitates and implements numerous smaller festivals, races, parades, and holiday events with a variety of themes.

Strengths

- Promotes cultural diversity
- Enhances tourism
- Provides visibility for the city

Weaknesses

- Events impact on city services for parking, security, etc.
- Heavily subsidized – several events pay for police service, garbage removal, etc.
- Large amounts of departmental resources are used to support these events with minimal return to the department

Key Findings and Observations

These events are totally subsidized with no revenue returned to the department. The department has applications and policies and procedures in place for event requests. Special

events provide an untapped opportunity for revenue development and for promoting the department.

Therapeutic Recreation

The department has been offering therapeutics programs since 1968. This is a core service. The program offers a variety of activities specially designed for the developmentally disabled and physically disabled. Programs are offered for children and adults. The department offers inclusion opportunities for this population as well.

Strengths

- Offers a variety of recreation programs for children and adults with disabilities
- Door to door transportation is provided
- All programs, including camps, are free
- A Saturday program for kids with developmental delays is offered
- Two six-week all day summer camps for kids with disabilities are offered
- A summer lunch grant program for kids attending camps is offered
- Staff have great ideas for expanding services and programs
- There is a program for mainstreaming children with emotional and behavioral issues
- Strong and active advisory council

Weaknesses

- The department is currently not offering any pre-school programs or programs for children with multiple disabilities
- Transportation takes more time for some programs than actual program time
- No revenue is generated
- The number of children with autism attending the Saturday program is increasing
- The summer lunch grant is granted to a facility instead of on an as-needed per child basis
- Staff and resources are limited
- The transition out of 'mainstream' to general recreation programs often does not happen
- The cost per participant is high

Key Findings and Observations

Staff has made a concerted effort to gather citizen input to develop the program. The department has conducted a study on therapeutic services to determine citizen satisfaction, identify critical issues, and to increase availability of service to the community. Extensive modifications to advertising and physical facilities have been made based upon this study, to improve the experience, increase availability, and increase participation. Facility descriptions in "In Your Neighborhood" include handicap accessibility information. Other promotional material produced by the department includes information about ADA accommodations. The program showed a 20% increase in participation over last year but is limited by staffing resources, space, and transportation. The therapeutic program is almost 100% subsidized. Generally, few fees are charged for services. Transportation is a costly and time-consuming aspect of the TR

program. There is opportunity for the department to partner with other agencies in Alexandria. Comprehensive training for department staff in meeting the needs for persons with disabilities is not in place, but it is a component of the department's diversity training.

Volunteers

Volunteers are used to supplement paid staff. This provides an opportunity for citizen involvement in programs.

Strengths

- Most volunteers are long term
- Most volunteers are age appropriate for the program that they are in
- Recreation and fun activities may attract volunteers
- Some areas depend on volunteers as staff

Weaknesses

- Hard to attract volunteers for the therapeutic Buddy Program
- No consistent volunteer screening process for the department
- Training is time consuming
- Statistics on volunteers are not tracked consistently

Key Findings and Observations

No recruiting effort is taking place on a citywide level. Volunteering occurs as programs need it. There are no recruitment materials. Background checks are not done for all volunteers. A system to track volunteer hours is needed.

Wellness And Fitness

The department offers a variety of programs promoting healthy lifestyles. The activities include instruction, drop-in fitness programs, and self-guided experiences.

Strengths

- Fitness programs are offered at a variety of locations
- The department offers a good mix of wellness programs such as weight training, boxing, fitness trails, and a variety of classes and sports

Weaknesses

- Quality of equipment varies according to the site
- Chinguapin charges admission to use the fitness room and has the oldest equipment
- Rooms are small
- There is no staff available to instruct on proper use of equipment

Key Findings and Observations

Fitness programs are popular in the city. Demand outstrips capacity. The department lacks a strategy to replace worn out or broken equipment. Capital items need to be inventoried and assigned a schedule for replacement. Fees for using fitness facilities are inconsistent. There is no orientation program in place for new users. The department does not track usage.

Youth Sports

This program consists of traditional sports, which are offered on a variety of levels for youth ages 5 to 17. Programs are offered year-round. Activities include baseball, softball, basketball, football, and tennis. This is a core program with an annual participation rate of 4,274.

Strengths

- Offers a variety of traditional athletic sports
- Volunteers are used as coaches, as baseball umpires, and serve on advisory boards

Weaknesses

- Fees generated do not cover costs
- Lack of facilities limit offerings

Key Findings and Observations

Program offerings appear to be limited by field and facility availability. The program is heavily subsidized with some programs recovering only a fraction of their costs. For example, the department provides jerseys and/or uniforms with some costing as much as \$55 per participant. Some localities have chosen to pass this cost on to the participants or to develop sponsorships to defray costs.